

News and Information

From the Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs

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Be Weary of Unfamiliar Area Codes

You walk in through your front door and see the familiar blinking light that says someone cared enough to leave you a message. You push play on the answering machine (or dial your voice-mail provider, if you're technologically inclined), and an unfamiliar voice happily chirps "Congratulations! You've won a free Caribbean cruise vacation! Call 809-555-5555 to claim your prize!"

You pick up the phone to call that number, but a little voice in your head says "Area code 809? Where is that?" That little voice is your sense of self-preservation. Listen to it. The 809 area code serves the Dominican Republic, a small country sharing the Caribbean island of Hispaniola with Haiti. If you dial that number, you'll be paying international phone rates. Worse yet, you could be dialing into a pay service that charges outrageous per-minute fees.

According to the Federal Trade Commission, scam artists in the Dominican Republic and other Caribbean countries often promote pay-per-minute phone services deceptively. Sometimes, they leave phony messages on victims' answering machines, offering a prize or even claiming that a family member has been injured. If you return the call, they will do anything they can to keep you on the line. At rates of up to \$25 per minute, you could run up an enormous phone bill.

Before you dial a number with an unfamiliar area code, check the telephone book to see where you are calling. This will only take a few seconds, and it may save you a great deal of money. You may also want protect yourself by instructing your children and other household members not to dial numbers of more than seven digits without your permission.

If you have questions or concerns regarding telephone scams or any other consumer issues, contact the Tennessee Division of Consumer Affairs at 1-800-342-8385 or visit www.state.tn.us/consumer.